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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE QURAN.

By DR. GUSTAV WEIL.

Translated from the second edition, with notes and references to the Quran and to other authorities, by Professor Frank K. Sanders, Ph.D. and Harry W. Dunning, B.A., of Yale University.

ISLAM — CONTINUED.

VI. *The Mutazilites.*—Even in the first century of the Hijra a violent opposition sprang up against the followers of the doctrine of predestination, who were favored by the government, and even a son of Umar, the pious Caliph, expressed himself in favor of the idea of the freedom of the will. They were naturally opposed by the Umayyads (Omeyyads) and suppressed, because their authority, resting on artifice and force, especially needed for support and justification the doctrine of the divine determinations and the predestination of all human affairs. Maabad, who stood at the head of the opposition, said in regard to his adversaries, "These people shed the blood of men and then dare to assert that all our acts are determined in advance by a divine decree." But as a matter of fact he was tortured and finally hung on account of his opinions, not because they were contrary to the Quran, but because they were dangerous to the absolute authority of the sovereign. He was executed by the terrible Hajjaj in A. H. 80, by order of the Caliph Abd Almalik. But nevertheless his doctrines spread and gave rise to the sect of the Mutazila and even influenced orthodox Islam, which indeed held fast to the doctrine of the predestination of the elect and the damned, yet—in fact without logical sequence—did not extend predestination to the individual good or bad acts of men, therefore, as with many Christian dogmatists, predestination really occurs only in consequence of foreknowledge. But the Quran, as appears from the passages quoted, rejects also this dogma and contains no place which speaks so decidedly for it as the following from the New Testament: "And as many (of

the gentiles) as were ordained to eternal life believed.”¹ “And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose. For whom he foreknew he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his son.”²

VII. *Other doctrines of Islam.*—We will not tarry longer on the remaining dogmas of Islam, partly because they do not enter so deeply into the inmost character of the faith and have less reference to life, and partly because their further development belongs to a later period and therefore to the history of Arabian philosophy rather than to our subject, Muhammad and the Quran. Such are the dogmas of the existence and attributes of God, of the eternity of the Quran and of the bliss of the righteous at the actual sight of God. All these dogmas gave rise to many conflicts and sects because some held to the letter of the Quran, others preferred a free interpretation: some blindly trusted to the so-called sayings of the prophet, others placed the law of the eternal reason above everything and strove to bring the religious systems into religious unity with the elements of Greek philosophy.

VIII. *Makrizi's opinion regarding early Islam.*—A famous Arab author, Makrizi, says in his history of religion, “When God sent his prophet Muhammad to men, this prophet gave them no different idea of God than that revealed to him by the angel Gabriel. No one asked him for a fuller explanation of this matter, as was the case in regard to other doctrines such as that of prayer, alms, fasting, pilgrimages, resurrection, hell and paradise. His contemporaries understood the meaning of the expressions relating to God in the Quran without especial instruction concerning the divine attributes, and no one thought of establishing a difference between attributes which pertained to his existence and those which pertained only to his activity. They were satisfied to recognize eternal attributes in God, such as knowledge,

¹ Acts 13:48.

² Romans 8:28–30. It should be noticed the frequent phrase, “whom God guides” often means simply “who takes God as a guide.” Cf. Sura 17:99 and 18:16. So in many places the phrase “God guides whom he will” means “God guides that one who wishes (to be guided).” Suras 2:209; 35:8, 9; 39:5; 32:13; 6:125.

power, life, will, hearing, sight, word,¹ fame, splendor, magnanimity, benevolence, strength, might. They did not express themselves any more clearly concerning these. They also took in a literal sense everything which God ascribes to himself in the Quran, such as face, hands, and so forth, without in the least degree thinking of a similarity of God to his creatures. They believed in the unity of God regardless of everything to the contrary, without, on the other hand, destroying God's existence by denying the attributes. They held fast to the authority of the Quran and believed in God and the mission of Muhammad without recognizing the methods of the scholastic theology or the investigations of philosophy."

IX. *Good works rather than faith the supreme requisite among the early Muslims.*—As we do not desire to go beyond the companions of the prophet, we will not follow further the history of the dogmas of Islam, and merely remark in closing that however much stress Muhammad laid in the Quran upon belief in *one* God, in the prophets, and in the immortality of the soul, and exhorted to prayer, fasting, and war for the faith, none the less in a host of places obedience to other revealed doctrines and a virtuous, pure life, according to the teaching of the Quran, is required from true believers and is noted as a means of obtaining the good-will of God and a share of the happiness of Paradise. It wrongs the founder of Islam to assert that he did not value the practice of virtue and resistance to passion and required only faith. How often do phrases like this occur in the Quran: "Those who believe and do good come to Paradise." But as this mistake is frequently made some passages may be adduced to prove the contrary: "Say! I am only a mortal like yourself. I am inspired that your God is only one God. Then let him who hopes to meet his Lord act righteous acts and join none in the service of his Lord."² "He who acts aright and he who is a believer there is no denial of his efforts; verily we write them down for him."³ "As for him who is outrageous and prefers the

¹ *I. e.*, his thought as he revealed it through prophets.

² Sura 18: 10.

³ Sura 21: 94. Compare also Sura 22: 14, 23, 49, and 5: 12.

life of this world, verily hell is the resort. But for him who feared the station of his Lord and prohibited his soul from lust, verily Paradise is the resort."¹ In Sura 74 the inhabitants of hell answer questions as to why they were condemned to such punishment. "We were not of those who prayed! we did not feed the poor, but we did plunge with those who plunge and we called the Judgment Day a lie."² Sura 70 reckons as inhabitants of Paradise "those who pray, divide their property with the poor, believe in the day of Judgment, are not dissolute nor faithless, do not break their word nor pervert true witness."³ In the third Sura usurers are threatened with the flames of hell.⁴ So if in other places Paradise is promised to those who believe in God and fight for his kingdom, yet it is by no means said that the rest is set aside by God-revealed teachings, but, on the other hand, a complete mastery over human passions and an exact obedience to God's will, as set forth in the Quran, is prescribed to the true believer, who must be prepared at any moment to sacrifice his life for his God. The Muslim dogmatists, who are even less to be confused with Muhammad than the church fathers with Christ, indeed maintain that believers, despite their evil deeds, are not thrust out of Paradise forever, but they still admit that they must first be punished for their crimes. It is maintained by Christian sects that unbelief alone deserves the name of sin and is reckoned against a man in the future; on the other hand he has no reward promised for good deeds. Christendom, the church independent of the state, might reject false doctrines, and progressive theology might seek to soften the harshness, to explain difficulties, and to separate the real from the unreal, and the additions of man from the truly divine. But in Islam the doctrines most favorable to the rulers always had the ascendancy, and of course the many crimes of the later Umayyads and first Abbasides, under whom the dogmatism of Islam was established, placed faith over good deeds, although in the Quran they go hand in hand.

X. *The personality of Muhammad the element of weakness in Islam.*—We are indeed far from wishing by these observations to put the founder of Islam on a level with the founder of Chris-

¹ Sura 79: 36-41.² Vss. 44-47.³ Vss. 22-33.⁴ Vss. 125, 126.

tianity, but in our opinion the difference lies in the personalities rather than in the dogmas. If the Mutazilites had been able to develop as freely as protestants, it is possible that a system of theology would have sprung from the Quran which at any rate would have satisfied the requirements of human reason, as well as Christian rationalism founded on the Gospels. In the personality of Muhammad, which first came really to the light during his stay at Medina, not in the different conception of the doctrines of the fall and the atonement or in the denial of the Trinity, that is of the Trinity as taught in the seventh century, is to be sought the decline and the eventual destruction of Islam. Christ was consistent throughout his life and sealed it by his death; but Muhammad shrank from threatening danger and sought by all kinds of artifices and finally by force to gain control for himself and for his religion. Moreover, later he was not content to spread general doctrines and moral precepts in the name of God, but his positive laws and ordinances were to be considered as coming from heaven, although he himself was frequently compelled by circumstances to change them and had too little control over himself to submit to them. Muhammad himself not only cannot be a mediator between God and man, but is not even a pattern of virtue; and so his revelations have come to nought and are incapable of inspiring the soul with true religious feeling. If the Quran, as compared with the Gospels, is full of anachronisms it is not because it combats various dogmas whose significance at that time was entirely unknown, but because, like the Pentateuch, it contains laws which are not useful and applicable to all countries and peoples nor to all times. Muhammad was originally a reformer and as such he deserves full recognition and admiration. An Arab who saw the dark side of the Judaism and Christianity of that period and sought at the peril of his life to crush polytheism and to impress upon his people the doctrine of the immortality of the soul deserves not only a place among the great men of history, but even the name of prophet. But as soon as he ceased to be a persecuted man, as soon as he tried to establish truth by means of assassination and open war, and in the name of God proclaimed new interna-

tional, ceremonial, civil, police and criminal laws, he put upon himself and his word the stamp of human weakness and transitoriness.

XI. *Legal material of the Quran.*—The ceremonial laws of Islam are indeed not so numerous as is commonly supposed in Europe, but there is one which at least frees Muhammad from the reproach of favoring the physical comfort of the Arabs in his precepts, viz., the fast of Ramadhan.¹ When we think of the glaring desert of Arabia and of the command for a whole month, from sunrise to sunset, not only to abstain from food but not even to drink a drop of water, it will be impossible to consider the observance of the Muslim regulations as easy or to affirm that it requires no struggle between soul and body. The prayer five times a day with the accompanying purification is less burdensome, for it is short and every man performs it for himself. The pilgrimage to Mecca, however, once in a lifetime, and only to be avoided by those whose circumstances do not permit of such a journey, requires of those who live far from this holy city a great sacrifice of money, time, and trouble.

The most important laws concerning food consist of the prohibition of wine, of blood, of animals dying a natural death or sacrificed in honor of an idol, of beasts of prey and of pork. The police who have charge of the markets have to look out for the observance of these regulations and also to prevent forbidden games of chance.

The laws of Islam which have to do with public law and administration determine the taxes, the division of booty, the treatment of prisoners, and the relations of believers to idolaters, Jews and Christians. According to the more severe laws of Muhammad's last years, they are to war against the idolaters until every trace of idolatry ceases, and against Jews and Christians until they submit and pay tribute. Only the tithe is to be exacted from believers and according to the Quran it is to be used for the poor, for travelers, for the tax-collector, for the freeing of slaves, for the assistance of those who have to pay an expiatory offering, for maintenance of the army, and to win

¹ Since the Arabs observe a lunar year, the month of Ramadhan comes in turn at all seasons of the year.

desirable people to the faith. It has already been mentioned that although Muhammad could not as a man have taught and acted otherwise under the prevailing conditions, still by these martial laws he weakened his prophetic position and thereby placed himself far below Christ who sought to gain, by inward character, not by force, the dominion of the world for his faith. But even Christianity itself, in direct opposition to the gospel, from the time it mounted the throne of the Cæsars until now has plainly shown how great the temptation is, after attaining to power, to use it for warring upon and suppressing those of other faiths.

But at any rate it is impossible to deny that, while intolerance is an outgrowth of Christianity which either church or state can root out and has rooted out in almost all European countries, it is forbidden in the Quran; at least there can be no talk of equality between Muslims and non-Muslims as long as this holds the position of a supreme and unquestioned law-book.

The law of punishment in the Quran is exceptionally mild. The death penalty is only for those guilty of unnatural crimes, of apostasy from Islam and of murder; and if the relatives of the murdered man prefer blood-money to revenge, even a murderer saves his life. Adulterers, too, at least in the Quran in its present form, are not punished with death, and in any case only when four male witnesses were present at the deed. For bodily injuries either the Old Testament law of retaliation was followed or the offender had to pay a fixed sum to the injured.

The most severe criminal law, which is justifiable only by the necessity of checking the inborn propensity of the Arab to thievery and robbery, is the cutting off of the hand for each appropriation of the property of another.

The civil laws of the Quran deal especially with inheritance and marriage. They are chiefly directed towards securing the rights of the woman and limiting the power of the man. Polygamy is not prohibited, but conditions are attached which the true believer can rarely fulfill. Fidelity in marriage is made a duty for the man. Another portion of the civil law takes up the lot of slaves, which Muhammad also sought to lighten. The way was prepared for the complete extinction of slavery,

and they were often freed, especially in the case of believers. Emancipation of all the slaves was hardly possible in view of the continual wars in which the conquered were permitted to live only as slaves. The poverty of the Quran in laws of traffic is explained partly by the simple conditions of the time and still more by the fact that Muhammad probably retained many existing customs without bringing out any revelation about them. This lack was soon felt; but they appealed first to oral traditions of Muhammad, then to the examples of the earlier Caliphs and their decisions, made with the help of learned men, and lastly, since in the completely changed conditions of life these became insufficient, they sought to decide from analogy, so that at times the most difficult questions about any matter, from a phrase in the Quran to a steamship voyage, could be settled in the name of heaven by a Muslim jurist just as by a rabbi of the old school.

XII. *The sociology of the Quran.*—The sociology of the Quran can be considered the most complete part of this remarkable book. To be sure, like the other subjects of the book, it is not found in any one chapter, but the most beautiful moral principles and precepts, like a golden thread, go through the whole web of superstition and deceit. Prejudice, vengeance, self-conceit, pride, falsehood, double-dealing, slander, invective, mockery, covetousness, profligacy, extravagance, jealousy, ostentation, distrust and suspicion are enumerated as godless vices; benevolence, humanity, modesty, forbearance, patience and perseverance, contentedness, uprightness, honesty, chastity, love of peace and truth, and, before everything, faith and devotion are recommended as the virtues most pleasing to God.

XIII. *The outlook for Islam.*—If, after this condensed discussion of Islam, one asks what future it has before it¹ and what progress it must make in order to push itself to the heights of European civilization, it seems probable that it must go the same way as reformed Judaism, both in sundering tradition from revelation and in making a distinction in the sacred word between

¹ Dozy thinks that Islam has a future development at least as brilliant as that of Catholic Christianity. He calls attention to the fact that they have gone through similar stages of development, and affirms that Islam is making great progress in southeastern Asia and the Indian Archipelago.

eternal truth and laws and precepts which are called out only by temporary external circumstances, and are suited only to a certain period and people. A future gradual union with Christianity is only possible if it is portrayed in such a way that Muhammad's polemic against it finds no point of attack. But if Christian missionaries proceed, as hitherto, to require of Muslims a belief in dogmas which they cannot grasp and which they, like the founder of their religion, are compelled to reject as heathenism, then all their efforts will still be fruitless. We must seek to enlighten the Muslim by the elementary study of the history of the world and of religion as well as of the sciences, instead of by means of the catechism and the Bible, which, without a commentary, are a closed book to non-Christians, its exterior repelling rather than attracting. If the money yearly expended by the different missionary societies for the conversion of the Muslims was used to found good schools, then able teachers sent to the Orient would do more to undermine the foundations of Islam than the missionaries with their free distribution of translations of catechisms and Gospels. Moreover, that after conversion to Christianity orientals would still be far from European culture is proved by the Christians living among them, who in many respects stand below the Muslims, although from the point of view of the missionaries of the various creeds the latter have the greater need. The work of the Turkish government in regard to education both in Stamboul and Cairo bears the mark of egotism and is always more or less connected with military affairs. The foundation of European institutions, good primary and grammar schools, is entirely lacking. Therefore there has been no inward change possible hitherto, but only a glossing over of old corruption; and therefore most orientals who have been sent to European universities for a scientific education have returned without having attained their aim.

But the fact that education at the present time is of a low grade is to be attributed not to Islam, but to bad government; for the high position which scientific studies held among Muslims in the Middle Ages proves that they are not incompatible with that faith. A sensible code of law, which alone can justify the Muslim Orient in taking a place beside European Christian

countries, is incompatible with Islam unless it is reformed as suggested above. Since many people have maintained that Muslims use their subjects of other faiths no worse than many Christian rulers treat theirs, we will cite a few laws which prove the contrary. The payment of a head-tax and the wearing of a distinct costume were early enforced. Worse yet are the following Muslim laws : Of unbelieving prisoners of war, the women and children are enslaved ; as for adult males, the Imâm is to decide whether they shall be killed, enslaved, exchanged, allowed to be ransomed, or, if it seems expedient, set free. A murderer is executed only if he has killed a Muslim, not for the slaying of an unbeliever. The blood-money for a non-Muslim is fixed at one-third of that for a believer. This was the reason of the long opposition of the Porte to the execution of the murderers of the consuls at Salonica. One indispensable qualification for a judge is that he should be a Muslim. An unbeliever is ineligible as a witness. Many other laws are not at all suited to our times ; as, for example, those relating to the tribute, which have long been observed by the Ottoman government only so long as they filled their own coffers. Also the limitation of trade to articles permitted to Muslims. Speculation in food products is forbidden. The government can compel the speculators to sell their stock at market price. No interest can be demanded for loans. But Europe has troubled herself little about such laws, which, however, for the most part are still in force : whence it has had to insist upon the actual suspension of all privileges founded on religious belief ; for only thus, even with better rulers than Turkey has had since the death of Sultan Mahmud, is a peaceful and harmonious intercourse between Christians and Muslims possible, and a single European power has undertaken to interfere with every protection in favor of the faithful. Whether the Sultan has the power to defy the Ulamas in this way is a question which does not belong here. But it is certain that an equalization of the different creeds, which is of more importance than nationalities, must put an end to the privileges of the Turkish race, if the Ottoman kingdom is to make genuine inward progress.